

# Southwest Chief & Front Range Passenger Rail Commission

Location – Colorado Department of Transportation  
4201 E. Arkansas Avenue, Denver, CO 80222  
3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Aspen Conference Room

Monday, July 31, 2017 2:00 – 4:00 p.m.

## COMMISSION MEMBERS:

Member Name	Organization	Attendance
Sara Cassidy	Union Pacific	X
Jill Gaebler	City of Colo Springs	X
Terry Hart	Pueblo County	X
Becky Karasko	NFRMPO	X
Rick Klein	City of La Junta	X
Sal Pace	Resident of Pueblo	X
Pete Rickershauser	BNSF Railway	X
Jacob Riger	DRCOG	X
Terry Sears	Resident of Trinidad	X
Jim Souby	Colorail	X
Bill Van Meter	RTD	X
Mark Imhoff*	CDOT	X
Ray Lang*	Amtrak	phone

\* Non-voting member

Additional attendance: David Krutsinger, CDOT/DTR - Deputy Director; Sharon Terranova, CDOT/DTR - Senior Transit & Rail Planner; Laura Morales-Garcia, CDOT/DTR - Program Assistant; Ron Papsdorf, CDOT/DTR - Intragovernmental Relations; Rick Pilgrim, HDR (facilitator); Randy Grauberger, Parsons Brinckerhoff; Rob Eaton (phone), Amtrak

### I. A. ATTENDANCE / EXCUSED Call to Order / Roll Call

Mark Imhoff opened the meeting at 2:03 p.m. and everyone introduced themselves.

### B. Minutes from prior Southwest Chief Commission (April 2017)

## II. REGULAR AGENDA

### A. Welcome, Opening Remarks & Introduction of Guests (Mark Imhoff)

Mark Imhoff stated we have a big job ahead of us, and a deadline fast approaching. He stated he would oversee this meeting, and with the successful election of a Chair by the end of this meeting, the Chair could take control of the next meeting.

### B. Summary Southwest Chief Commission Efforts, September 2014 – June 2017 (Sal Pace) / Attachment

Commissioner Pace presented a handout on the history of the Southwest Chief and reviewed that handout. There are still incomplete tasks and the Front Range Rail Commission is left to wrap up the work, also noting that BNSF has accepted obligation to maintain work completed along the Southwest Chief line where work has been completed. He mentioned that the operation of the “through car” would be to detach a car from the Southwest Chief arriving from Chicago at La Junta, attach it to a train to run to Pueblo; upon return from Pueblo, the car would be attached to the through Southwest Chief for return to Chicago.

## **C. Amtrak Southwest Chief Status (Ray Lang)**

### **a. Preservation & Track Rehabilitation of Current Route**

Generally contracts are maintained with a 15 to 20 year maintenance agreement for track, so when the Amtrak agreement with BNSF for operation, maintenance of the Southwest Chief route was due to expire in 2016, BNSF approached AMTRAK in 2011 and noted when the contract expired, they would no longer be maintaining the track at the current class. La Junta Sub (east of Las Animas Junction, 12 miles east of La Junta) would be dropped over time from 79 MPH to 30 MPH; Raton and Glorieta Subs south of Trinidad would not be maintained by BNSF at all, and entire cost of maintenance would fall to Amtrak as the Southwest Chief was the only train using the line between Trinidad and Lamy, NM.

Through partnerships with State Transportation Departments in three states (Colorado, Kansas, and New Mexico) and two successful TIGER Grants, much of the rail between Kansas and Las Animas Junction has been replaced, with some work also done in New Mexico. This leaves a big gap from Lamy, New Mexico to Trinidad, Colorado. Another opportunity for a TIGER Grant will present itself this summer. New TIGER guidelines could come out as early as this week.

Hutchinson to La Junta is in really good shape. There is 48-50 miles left to repair. In response to a question about when BNSF could lower speeds on the sections of the line which had not been repaired with the TIGER grants, Ray said BNSF could drop the speeds at any time below 79 MPH. He said BNSF also changed their position on maintenance of the route after the new rail is installed in the last few years, and committed to maintain the track to the class of improvements in western Kansas and eastern Colorado where the rail had been replaced for the life of the rail.

### **b. Consideration of Pueblo Re-route, including La Junta – Pueblo “Through Train” / Attachment & link**

The Southwest Chief could run La Junta to Pueblo then on to Trinidad without missing a stop versus the current Southwest Chief route. However, some of the options, such as running Pueblo-Trinidad through Walsenburg, are cost prohibitive. There is also the idea of running through cars, cut the cars from the train at the La Junta stop and operate them to and from Pueblo.

The concept of the Pueblo “through car” via La Junta is “magical.” It must also be noted that any train that operates less than 750 miles on Amtrak other than on the Northeast Corridor must be funded by a state. All such short distance trains get funded by a state, are in partnership with a state and Amtrak. Operation of the “through car” does not obligate Colorado to pay for extension of Southwest Chief service La Junta-Pueblo.

Positive train control (PTC) (<https://www.up.com/media/releases/170531-ptc-progress.htm>) is another item that must be considered when discussing the Pueblo through car operation. This is now the law. BNSF has advised the route needs new passing sidings. Amtrak needs to work out an agreement with BNSF permitting the Pueblo connection to start up without the Pueblo through car connection having priority over freight trains, as is now required. Amtrak is now in discussions to see if an interim PTC waiver is possible, but costs are unknown; PTC would need to be installed eventually. Idea is to get the service established and grow it, and invest in upgrades, over time.

There was a ridership study that was completed by Pueblo regarding this possibility and the outcome was positive. Pete Rickershauser distributed two maps, showing BNSF Powder River Division including lines in Colorado as well as a highlighted map showing the Southwest Chief route across western Kansas, Colorado and northeastern New Mexico so those present can get an idea of what areas we are talking about.

Before service could be, an ADA-compatible station platform in Pueblo would have to be built, switches would have to be installed and powered. Funding and agreements would also have to be in place.

#### **D. Overview of Front Range Passenger Rail Programs & Studies**

##### **a. RTD FasTracks (Bill Van Meter) / Attachment**

RTD Board is committed to finishing FasTracks, but funding for capital and operating improvements beyond what is currently underway/committed to through 2020 has not been identified. RTD ridership peaked several years ago, has plateaued, and more recently declined slightly. In response to a question, ridership declines have mainly been on the bus side, with the rail side ridership being stable to up. More on the bus side are seeing slight decline.

##### **b. North I-25 Commuter Rail & Interregional Connectivity Studies (David Krutsinger) / Attachment**

We are working with the freight railroads. Establishing passenger rail along the Front Range is all about political support.

#### **E. Current Commission Role & Structure (Rick Pilgrim) / Attachments**

##### **a. SB 17-157 Enabling Responsibilities**

##### **b. Organizational Structure: Officers, Sub-Committees, other.**

In reviewing the Senate Bill 17-157 you can see what responsibilities and deadline lie ahead. Handouts, you need to determine what you are about and how are you going to do your business. Some items to consider:

- Purpose of your program
- Key terms
- Ticket issues - funding
- Election
- Administration
- Other states who have already went through this

#### **F. Summation & Next Steps**

Mark Imhoff asked to hear from the new Commissioners. Jacob Riger stated we have four months to deliver on the Commission's Front Range legislative requirement, and noted the Southwest Chief mission is clearer, but what is the Front Range mission, how are we going to meet that deadline? Sal Pace stated it was possible, we are a diverse group, we need to think incrementally versus looking at the entire Front Range and worry about the money later. Jim Souby noted funding is possible, to get it in the charter, and be very brief in the vision. Bill Van Meter noted, what that limited vision looks like, he has lots of questions running through his mind.

Pete Rickershauser suggested we separate into two working groups or committees, one focused on Southwest Chief (SWC) and the other on Front Range Passenger Rail (FRPR). The SWC can also start

to focus on a nearterm TIGER grant opportunity and FRPR group can focus on the definition of what it is and framing that up.

Sal Pace stated the Commission does not have legal staff on board and if we got something put together, not terribly complicated or different concepts by November 1, 2017, maybe we could get access to assistance from Government offices and have it back from them in time for review.

Jim Souby stated up for consideration should include what is the service to be proposed and how will it change over time, he supports the building block approach. Could this be accommodated? Government structure is less important right now, but we do need to have this in the back of our mind right now. Find out what our other needs are, what we are talking about for other accommodations. The last matter is to include Pueblo service - how we make that happen. Support Pueblo, Front Range and then also maybe charter.

Mark Imhoff asked if anyone thought the waiver for PTC would be approved. Pete Rickershauser answered that because of liability, the requirement is not going away. Does not see a waiver for any of the operations where passenger rail operates on freight rail lines.

Rick Klein stated two of the three TIGER Grants applied for were successful in securing funding for the Southwest Chief route and we would like to go for the next TIGER Grant.

Mark noted that a Chair is needed. Jim Souby made a motion to elect Sal Pace as the Chair for the Commission. Sal Pace noted that he would only consider serving as Chair if elected if he would serve through December 2017. There were no other nominations or disagreements to this condition. Rick Klein seconded the motion. Consensus – Sal Pace is Chair for the Commission through December 2017.

Jim Souby nominated Jacob Riger as Vice Chair  
Rick Klein seconded the nomination  
By a consensus Jacob Riger is the Vice Chair for the Commission.

Mark Imhoff suggested we have three committees, Southwest Chief and Front Range Passenger Rail. In addition, Jim Souby will draft the Charter and Jill Gaebler will assist. Rick Klein will also assist and view.

The SWC Committee will work on the TIGER Grant and the Pueblo Extension including the PTC items. The FRPR will work on the concepts draft for legislation ideas and bring those back to the larger group for consideration to work through those issues. These Committees should meet before the next meeting of the Commission which will plan to meet the last week of August.

Sara Cassidy said we will need to connect the dots and survey what we have, see what is missing. We have different perspectives, in it for a coordinated unified, just trust we are all for it.

Mark Imhoff stated that we need to keep in mind, we have no funds, and we must be careful and cautious on what we are requesting, as we have to have a way to pay for it.

### **III. ADJOURN**

Meeting was adjourned at 4:17 p.m.